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THE REVOLT AGAINST
SENTIMENTAL SCRUPLES!

THE SOCK

A PLAY OF PROTEST

BY

DON ORNO

TOGETHER WITH
A FOREWORD ON MARITAL MORALITY
and UNMORAL MURDER

BY

PHIL. HOPE



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The Three Pamphleteers

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Brooklyn, N. Y.

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THE SOCK

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

DON ORNO, *pseud*

AUTHOR OF "DEFICIT," "THE UNMARRIED FATHER"
AND OTHER PLAYS



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The Three Pamphleteers

1004 Eastern Parkway

Brooklyn, N. Y.

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A Word on Marital Morality and Unmoral Murder

by way of preface.

SINCE Bernard Shaw began bombarding the decadent moralities and sanctities, the echoes of criticism have steadily rumbled thru letters, politics, religion and life in general.

In the melee, the drama has become the literary weapon for shooting the new idea into the unwary mind. Naturally, those issues closest to the inner life of us all have supplied the most powder. Of these, sex is easily first.

The cry of sex-freedom which has been ringing in our ears for some time merely portends the coming of a new morality. That mid-Victorian drivplings on marital morality are at odds with our rapidly developing pagan leanings, that popular beliefs in narrow faithfulness to wife or husband—so sublimely emphasized in the silent and spoken drama of Broadway—may not always be moral or beautiful is growing clearer as the hours pass.

False notions of living still swaddle us in too many suppressed impulses. Social psychologists, as well as untutored laymen, are beginning to question the wisdom of clamping sex emotions within seal-tight compartments. Yes, we are growing impatient of New England rigidities. Can it be that the spirit of another Renaissance is beating in our blood?

Of the many conflicts precipitated by the sex-life of our time, one that is seldom discussed, tho most commonly suffered, is whether love must remain satisfied within the bounds of the marriage circle or dare it rightfully venture beyond.

To answer the question in the light of an outgrown morality is too easy. It ignores the basis of a governing universal creed; the greatest happiness for Me—here and now, demanding new adjustments. It overlooks the fact that the great urge behind woman's cry for emancipation is, consciously or unconsciously, sex-freedom.

Don Orno in "The Sock" attempts no categorical answer; preaches no inept sermon. He draws a picture with artistic skill and lets life talk thru his persons.

"The Sock" is a radio-flash across the black night of love conventions and marital superstitions. It squares the old triangle and gives it a modern setting.

The play is not a flippant or lurid treatment of forbidden love with a dash of Gallic pepper. It is an honest exposition of beautiful, open love—despite legally wedded partners—between kindred spirits; which love today may hypocritically show its face only in the rear-alleys of city Bohemias.

The author contrasts the emotional with the cerebral woman; the orthodox male with the heterodox, vivifying *the crossing of old prejudices and new insights*.

The new age says in effect that freedom to love shall not be abridged. Tolerance between man and wife, which is nothing but part pride, part condescension, will not suffice. Only acute sympathy, deep, deep understanding of the vagaries of sex emotion will eliminate dilemmas of devotion to wife or husband versus sincere love for another.

The theme runs along a double thread. Intrudes a second question: Is murder ever unmoral? Doctors have been known to cause death in certain instances. Nations at war have not hesitated to conscript lives. Specifically, may a useless, money-hoarding hag be cut off in order to save a poet? The reader is left to judge the criminality of the crime and whether the pagan explanation of joy and service suffice.

But—we have already tarried too long.

Before the curtain rises, be it noted that Don Orno is one of the most promising of our younger dramatists, who has consistently refused to sell his soul to the commercial devils of Broadway, tho ten-fold more gifted than the playmongers who peddle their cheap wares for uncritical audiences.

"The Sock" is submitted as an honest offering toward the birth of a genuine American drama.

PHIL HOPE.

Brooklyn, N. Y., 1919.

THE SOCK



PERSONS IN THE PLAY.

OSCAR, a violinist; a restless protestant and pagan; his physique is strong and symmetric; speaks with conscious lyrical intonation.

NATALIE, his wife; reposeful; womanly after the old order; has a plain face lit up by brilliant brown-black eyes.

CLARA, a poet with a *new* inspiration; womanly after the new order; her face combines the hectic and shadowy loveliness of the romantic stage of tuberculosis.

HARRY, her husband; self-effacing, melancholic; weakly altruistic; a wavering radical.

KATIE, a slavey tho a grandmother; an active old woman; gaunt, grey and slight; speaks in high-pitched tones.

ONE ACT

SCENE: *The living room of a West 17th Street furnished flat of the "Modern" type of perhaps twenty years ago. Its present occupants have nearly succeeded in toning down its blatant ugliness. R. front and L. C. are doors... R. C. is a mantel-piece with its mirror partly concealed by a black and yellow Japanese screen. L. front is a wall telephone. Back stage are two curtainless windows looking out on a backyard. The right window shows the rusty framework of a fire-escape. Between the windows stands a wide couch covered with an Indian blanket on which lies an open violin case, showing instrument and bow. Back-stage left is a steam-heater and in front of it a morris chair. Centre is a small table; to the left a rocking-chair. Several chairs in different parts of the room. Gaslight chandelier over table.*

TIME: Early evening.

DISCOVERED:

OSCAR, in the morris chair with his feet stretched towards the steam heater, and NATALIE, seated at the table, painting on china.

THE SOCK.

NATALIE: Dear— (*Pauses for but gets no response. Louder*): Dear—
OSCAR (*barely audible*): Yes, Natalie.

NATALIE: I think I don't paint badly on china.....(*Holds up her work for him to see. Oscar broods with eyes half-closed. Disappointed, she resumes painting. Pause.*) And—I am thinking of selling my work—(*Apparently unheard. Pause.*) To help keep Clara in the mountains.—

OSCAR (*starts up; rises and stands beside Clara; in a husky voice*): Natalie—you are very good.

NATALIE (*smiling*): Oh, no.....(*Laughing, quietly.*) It serves my purpose to keep Clara far away in the mountains.

OSCAR: No, Natalie, you are kind, kind beyond words.....I believe you would do everything to keep Clara here—if it would make me happy.

NATALIE: What! Am I not a woman—your wife!

OSCAR (*studies her a second*): No: you are an angel.

NATALIE (*with a throaty, rippling laugh that seems wrung from a sob*): O! Oscar, Oscar, I'd rather be a woman. (*Nestles her head against his sleeve.*)

OSCAR (*lightly kissing her hair*): Indeed you are *one* woman in a million!
(*A timid knock on the door. Oscar opens the door and admits Katie.*)

Ah, good evening, Katie. (*Smiling.*) Our rent is paid.

NATALIE: Good evening, Katie.

KATIE (*walks to C. and Oscar closes door.*) Let me stay a minute, won't you?

NATALIE: Certainly; with pleasure.

OSCAR: Of course. Make yourself right to home.

KATIE: Thank you very kindly, folks. It ain't 'bout yourself I've come—but your neighbors.

NATALIE: Yes—

KATIE (*regretfully*): The missus is goin' to put 'em out. I feel sorry for the pore sick thing. I'm hopin' somethin' could be done.

OSCAR (*morose*): Your dear old slave-driver will be spared the trouble. They leave to-night.

NATALIE: Yes, Clara is going to the mountains to heal her lungs.

KATIE (*nodding her head in approval*): That's good.....the pore little critter.....The missus keeps complainin' their rent's allus behind and acursin' the little woman for coughin' all night.

OSCAR (*savagely*): She's a brutal old carcass, isn't she? She has no more soul than one of her sabertoothed bed-bugs.

KATIE: The old woman is got her faults, I aint denyin'. (*With conviction*): But she must have a soul, havin' religion.

THE SOCK.

OSCAR: The two go together, eh?

KATIE: I don't see how as not. (*Starts for the door.*)

NATALIE: Sit down a moment, Katie.

KATIE: Thank you, ma'am: (*Takes the rocking-chair.*) The truth to tell, I'm jest achin' for a little conversation.....if you don't mind(*Oscar returns to the morris chair.*) There's no talkin' to the old un. She mumbles to herself.....exceptin' when she's lay-in' you out—then she's clear enough 'tho there aint a tooth in her mouth.....She's seen more'n eighty years, but her mind's as bright as a new knife—and sharp.....I tell you.....

NATALIE: But Katie, speak for yourself. You're more than holding your own.

KATIE: Well, ma'm, seein' as how I'm more'n seventy and in the service of a partikler housekeeper—it's sayin' somethin'.

NATALIE: Wouldn't it be nice if you could stop working and rest your old bones?

KATIE: I reckon my chance for rest 'll come when they lay me out..... I aint complain'.....With the Lord's sanction I brung eleven children into the world; four are alive. Them has their own cares now—little ones too—and I looks to myself.

OSCAR: Resignation makes Rockefeller's world go round!

KATIE: Aint that a funny thing to say!

OSCAR (*glumly*): It's the saddest think I know of.

KATIE: Whatever it means it don't do no good to be down in the mouth. You mought as well be cheerful.

OSCAR (*rising and walking about nervously*): The supine Pollyanna philosophy—

NATALIE: Oh, Oscar! That language will never satisfy Katie's craving for conversation.

KATIE (*good-naturedly*): Book speech is allus wasted on me, but can I expect folks to come down to my unlearned level? I'm thankful jest to be with folks that are social-like.

OSCAR (*standing in front of Katie and taking her hand, impulsively*): Natalie is right. It's bad taste. But look here, Katie, as a friend to a friend, how many minutes of the livelong day are you happy being slavey to that old skinflint?

KATIE (*shaking her head; sadly*): I guess you know, sir.....But we don't like to give in. (*Oscar releases her hand and resumes striding about the room*). We don't like to give in. I don't even have a dog's life. A dog has his corner and bone. But neither a minute nor a crumb can I call my own. The missus is a wakeful critter. She never leaves that wheel chair of hern and takes only cat naps. She's spyin' on me all the time, cursin' me with her scratchy voice and weighin' and measurin' the vittles which I snatch and eat like a sneak thief behind a fence.....Sometimes..... I think.....'twould've been better to be born dead.

NATALIE: Oh, Katie, we're so sorry.

THE SOCK.

OSCAR: Katie, not all. You are not an object for pity. You've been cheated.

KATIE: Cheated, sir?

NATALIE: Never mind, Katie; you want conversation—not a treatise on old age pensions, or motherhood endowments. (*To Oscar*): In another moment, dear, you'll make this sound like a play of ideas. You know, propaganda is the bane of drama; people don't go to the theatre to think,—they can read Brisbane's editorials.

OSCAR: Natalie, Katie, I beg ^{you} pardons. We must let the facts speak for themselves. Natalie, be good enough to direct the dialectics.

KATIE: You've got me all bewildered-like—.

NATALIE: Katie, that's how Oscar and I have fun. We pretend we are people in a play. We get so that we take our ill-luck as a make-believe affair that will be over in a little while when the curtain rings down.

KATIE (*shaking her finger at Oscar*): There, sir, you're no better'n me; we all has our ways of not givin' in; I don't want to discourage you, but I'm of a mind the curtain don't ring down 'cept for good.

OSCAR (*amused*): Ha! ha! Katie, you've got me, haven't you? (*Seriously*): But I keep protesting—there's the difference.

KATIE: It's well enough for the young what can help theirselves—to protest! Look at me! What can I do? Who'll have an old woman with one foot in the grave for help.....Why, sir, I got to be content. My own children find me in the way. And it's either thisor the poor farm. (*Rising.*) And I'll never go to the poor farm while there's a breath in me!

OSCAR: There, there! That's splendid protest!

NATALIE: Good, good. You are a kindred spirit. Sit down and let us talk some more.

KATIE: Thank you, m'am; thank you, I'm sure. But the missus 'll be screamin' for me in a minute; she's that nervous about the sock—.

OSCAR: The sock——.

KATIE (*impressively*): That's where she keeps it!

OSCAR: Keeps what?

KATIE: The rent money! She won't trust no bank, she won't. And it's stuffed so full and hard—it could make a perfect bludgeon.

NATALIE: But that isn't safe, is it, Katie?

KATIE: That's just it, m'am. But she won't trust no bank. And she's afrettin' 'bout the sock frightful. (*In a lower tone*): What's more, she thinks there's a masked man prowlin' round the fire-escape near where she sits. Many a time she screams, "There he is, there he is." I run and look and see no one. She's that scared 'bout the sock,—she's took to settin' on it, and it 'pears to me she's moughty uncomfortable.

THE SOCK.

NATALIE: How queer!

(Oscar seems in deep thought).

KATIE: Good night, folks, and I thank you for lettin' me be company.

NATALIE: Good night, Katie. Come again soon.

OSCAR *(starting)*: Oh, good night, good night.

KATIE *(goes to R. door, opens it, steps out and exclaims "Good evenin" to persons in the hallway. The mingled voices of a man and woman answer her greeting.)*

OSCAR *(rising and going to the door)*: Ah, there's Clara and Harry. *(Enter Clara and Harry; the latter carrying two suit-cases, which he leaves front stage C.)*

All packed I see! *(To Clara, solicitously)*: Let me take your things. Sit down; do. You mustn't stand, you know. *(Clara takes the rocking-chair)*. That's better.

CLARA *(slipping out of her coat, which Oscar takes)*: Everyone is good and thoughtful! I am sure one of you will find a way to breathe for me.

HARRY: Oh, dear, if we could!

OSCAR *(throwing her coat upon the couch and returning to Clara's side)*: Up there in the mountains kind Mother Nature will do it for you.....Oh, I say, do take off your hat; let us see your hair.

CLARA: Of course——*(removes her hat and places it on the table.)*

OSCAR *(hovers about Clara.....Murmurs in her ear)*. How we shall miss you *(Caressing her hair)*: Fragrant as April lilacs and blue-black as April night!

CLARA: O, Oscar, I shall hear your words in a beautiful symphony of memory.

HARRY: It is beautiful to hear poets talk!

NATALIE: Poets' talk is commonplace; but lovers' talk is beautiful.

OSCAR *(to Natalie)*: Your understanding is beautiful!

CLARA: Ah, yes, understanding! Understanding is the jewel conceived of the mind's development——.

NATALIE: I try to understand, not only with my mind, but with my heart.

CLARA: The mind discovered the heart.

HARRY: I beg pardon, I don't want to interrupt, but our train goes in half an hour.

OSCAR *(taking Clara's hands)*: Half an hour!

CLARA: Oh, Oscar, I don't see that it's worth while! Our funds will carry us only three months. And three months of mountain air wont heal my sick lungs. It would be only a slight palliative. I'd rather stay here—even if the doctor says it's my death sentence!

THE SOCK.

HARRY: It's selfish of me to want to go along. I'll stay behind, and that'll give you six months. And maybe I'll find something profitable to do, after all.

OSCAR (*agitated*): That was settled long ago! Harry, you must go! You are better than a thousand nurses!

CLARA: But only three months—little good—.

OSCAR: We are here—Natalie and I. We'll find a way to keep you there.

CLARA: Natalie—.

NATALIE (*brightly*): Indeed! I have taken to painting on china.

CLARA: For me?

NATALIE: Certainly, Clara. I want to keep you away as long as possible.

HARRY: You don't know how grateful I am, Natalie.

CLARA: Oscar.....May I say something strange?.....I rejoice that I am dying of consumption. It makes possible our love idyll. It's their pity (*indicating with a sweep of her arms Harry and Natalie*) that permits—.

OSCAR: No, no, on the contrary, consumption has kept us apart—.

CLARA (*quickened astonishment*): Kept us apart!

OSCAR: Yes, but understand me. If I would let go my passion would consume you in one flame.

HARRY: Ah, I know what that means.....

CLARA (*compassionately*): Harry.....Oh, Harry.....

HARRY: Yes, dear, I whipped passion out like a ravening cur. Say, have I not been as a father——.
(*Natalie resumes painting on china.*)

CLARA: Dear, dear, more——.

OSCAR: So...so....Harry. I have come to know that. You have kept her alive. You are as necessary to her as a mother to a stricken babe. She is more than wife, more than well-beloved,—she is a poet with a new inspiration. Art's sustenance is the new inspiration. Take her away and preserve her to life and art. Win her back to health and your reward shall be——.

HARRY (*eagerly*): My reward—.

OSCAR (*lowers his head, and after a minute's silence, shows in an eloquent gesture that he will give up Natalie; whispers*): Yes, yes ——— (*Walks about the room nervously*). And don't worry. I will find a way to keep you there; that shall be my bit.

CLARA (*alarmed*): Which means—parting forever.....Is that easier than death? Harry, Harry, forgive me, —no, no, stretch your already boundless pity.....but, Natalie, I can ask no more of you.

NATALIE: Shall I tell you my mind—candidly?

CLARA: Do.....do.....

THE SOCK.

NATALIE: Death would be easier—.

HARRY (*pained; startled*): Oh, Natalie—.

NATALIE: I, too, am a woman.....I want Oscar. Go with him and have your love's deliria—with the early inevitable end. In the grey gloom I shall come to him as a warm light. Maybe,—he'll be consumptive then.....and need me more. But I pray God that then.....I may be the only woman.

HARRY (*horrified by her brutal frankness*): Don't please.....oh, don't—.

OSCAR (*impatiently*): We're done with all that.....My word, Clara, how you talk of parting forever. Forever! Another spin of the cycle and we meet again. The next time may be our love's Nirvana!

CLARA: Yes, indeed.....how I have talked of separation—as tho love depended on physical nearness—.

NATALIE: I need him always near;—the world is a void without him.

CLARA: I defy distance, time, pain. Oscar is the rythm of my consciousness: the leit motif of my senses.....Out there.....the trees, Oscar, will talk with your lyrical voice.....and the birds of the deep, pure forest will trill your love songs.....(*Rhapsodic*): Day-long, nightlong.....the streams rippling with your laughter; the freshening breeze your caress; the sun's glow your warm, life-giving kisses—how then shall I be lonesome!

HARRY (*sobbing*): Oh, Clara, Clara, there is nothing for me—nothing!

CLARA: Nothing.....nothing.....save gratitude, reverence—.

HARRY (*courageously*): Don't mind me, dear. Forgive the childish outbreak.....Emotion has a way of whelming philosophic resignation. Time and time again I renounce the mere chance that made you my wife.....Even as you, I was of the moderns, holding marriage a scrap of paper and mutual love the only tie that binds.....Yet when the trial came—.

CLARA (*sympathetically*): How you have been tried—.

HARRY: How could I rend the past that welded me to you.....Alas, I spring from conventional stock; was reared in an atmosphere of Victorian reserve and respectability. I recall sweet memories of faith, peace and decency, and lapse into bourgeois dreams of sacred family life,—followed by dark hours of loss when I blame Bohemian camaraderie.

OSCAR (*caustic*): Banal and trite recriminations.

HARRY (*stung*): Yes, Oscar in that world of restraint and rule the first instinct of a gentleman is not to make love to a friend's wife.

(*Clara's face shows that she regards this outburst as sheer blasphemy.*)

NATALIE (*laughing*): And he would remember his responsibility to his wife.

THE SOCK.

OSCAR (*bored*): Oh, let us have done with bourgeois atavism. Sentimental introspection is the foe of individualism.

NATALIE (*serious*): Because we behold ourself in the white light of our conscience!

CLARA (*severely*): Conscience is the pall with which the church stifles the soul.

OSCAR (*laughing and moving about the room restlessly*): Ha! Ha! We are making our last supper a feast of heavy epigrams. (*Stops and his eyes rest on the framework of the fire-escape. With a sudden move he places the screen in front of the window, shutting out the view of the fire-escape.*)

OSCAR: I say, a little wine would go well. Let us drown weighty words in light wine.....Wine by all means.

HARRY (*studying his watch*): There are only a few minutes.

OSCAR (*gayly*): There's always time for wine.

CLARA (*musically*): Wine.....wine.....

HARRY (*carrying the refrain*): Wine.....wine.....

NATALIE: We have little time and no wine.....

HARRY: I'll run and get it.

OSCAR: No.....no, let us remain together. Natalie, send your signal for Katie. She'll fetch it.

NATALIE (*going to steam-heater*): Listen. (*With her ringed finger strikes thrice on the steam-heater pipe. A moment later a response is heard—three taps on the pipe below.*) That means she'll come right up. (*Oscar disappears behind the screen.*) Katie is be'ter than a bell-boy. And seventy years do not make her feel less fleet (*Facetiously*): The survival of the fleetest. (*Laughter. A knock on the door.*)

HARRY (*still merry*): Come in, good Katie, come in.

KATIE (*entering*): It's good to see you folks havin' a good time.

NATALIE: We're having a good-bye party. Katie, could you go out for a bottle of chianti?

KATIE (*cheerfully*): An' glad I am to do it. The missus is takin' one of her naps. (*Takes the dollar bill which Natalie holds out to her.*) (*Exits.*)

HARRY: What a good soul she is!

NATALIE: Yes, indeed.

CLARA (*meditative; after several moments of silence, looks about the room*): Where is Oscar——.

HARRY: No one saw him go.

NATALIE (*merrily*): Come out Oscar. I saw you go behind the screen.....

HARRY (*after a moment's silence, looks behind the screen*): He's not here.

THE SOCK.

NATALIE: I'm sure I saw him.

CLARA: Let us not take notice. He may be preparing a surprise.
(*The sound of scraping and stirring is heard behind the screen. They see Oscar emerge. His face is pale and tense, and there is something under his coat which causes the garment to bulge.*)

OSCAR (*staccato*): Quick, Harry, open one of the bags.

HARRY (*impelled by the intensity of his tone*): Righto—. (*Kneels and hastily opens the nearest valise. Oscar takes from under his coat a long black object, apparently a women's stocking stuffed to capacity.....Natalie gasps, and her eyes open wide; but she instantly exercises control.....Oscar jams the stocking into the bag and hurriedly closes it. Harry fastens the buckles and straps.*) Well, well, it's in, whatever it is!

OSCAR (*straightening himself; very solemn*): Never breathe a word of the stuffed stocking. It doesn't exist. Everything hangs on that. Remember, above all, that I haven't left this room or your sight for an instant.
(*Clara's and Harry's faces show how mystified they are.*)

OSCAR: I said I would find a way. (*Triumphantly*): That sock is full of money.

HARRY: Full of money!

CLARA: Fancy—.

OSCAR: Yes, enough for years.

(*A knock on the door. Softly*): Not a word; be yourself..... Come in Katie. (*Enter Katie carrying a bottle.*) Good, Katie. You haven't been a minute.

KATIE (*pridefully*): I aint so old that I can't shake a leg.
(*Laughter*).

OSCAR (*taking the bottle*): Sit down a minute, Katie, and make merry with us—.

KATIE: Thank you, kindly sir, I dassint.

OSCAR: But a sip of wine! Yes, you must have a sip of wine. Natalie, the glasses, please. (*Natalie exits L. and returns with a tray and four glasses. Oscar's hand is steady as he uncorks the bottle and fills the glasses.*) Here we are. (*Natalie holds out the tray and each takes a glass. Oscar poises his glass*): Here's to Life Force and Holy Protest.

KATIE (*drinking*): The Lord love us all.

HARRY (*merely touches his lips to the brimming glass and places it on the table.*) We must go at once to make our train. (*Nervously looks for and finds his hat and shakes hands with all. He takes up the suit-cases.*) Good-bye, good-bye, dear friends.

OSCAR (*taking Clara's glass which she has just emptied*): I'll get your things. (*Brings her hat and holds her coat for her.*)

CLARA (*rises and looks long into Oscar's face; tenderly*): Farewell, dear Oscar. (*Walks to Natalie and takes her hand*): Good-bye, Natalie.

NATALIE: God bless you, Clara.

CLARA: Thank you, dear. (*Kisses Natalie's hand, impulsively*).

THE SOCK.

NATALIE: Oh, Clara. (*Tears appear in her eyes. She embraces Clara.*)

KATIE (*opening the door*): Good night, folks and God bless you.

OSCAR
HARRY
NATALIE } : Good night.
CLARA

(*Exit Katie*)

OSCAR (*in a strained whisper*): Go, go.....good-bye, good-bye.

CLARA { (*touched*): Good-bye—(*They go out silently, leaving the*
HARRY { *door open.*)

OSCAR (*after closing the door; briskly*): Be matter of fact. Katie will be up in a minute. (*Natalie returns to the china.*) Well, Natalie, how much will one of your decorated dishes fetch?

NATALIE: Very little.

OSCAR (*taking up his violin and tuning it*): And my fiddling? At best.....barely ekes out a living.....Well.....there *had* to be a way. (*Tries the strings with his fingers. Takes up the bow and is about to play.*)

NATALIE: Dont'—. How can you?

OSCAR: A merry tune goes well with a good deed. (*Plays a wild, merry, impromptu air.*)

NATALIE: You are quite mad. (*A knock on the door followed by a nervous tattoo of raps.*)

OSCAR: Come in, come in—(*continues to play*).

KATIE (*entering, is pale and trembling*): Oh, sir, stop a moment. Something dreadful has happened.

OSCAR (*stopping*): What's that, Katie?

KATIE: Oh, sir, something dreadful (*covers her face with her hands*): awful, awful, oh—oh—.

OSCAR: What can it be! Have you seen a mouse?

KATIE: Oh, the Lord forgive you, sir; don't jest now! The missus..... Lord.....(*gasps for breath*).

NATALIE (*soothingly*): Do sit down, Katie. Has something happened to the missus?

KATIE (*seats herself but rises again*): Oh, ma'm, its terrible. Happened while I was out. Seems the missus was right after all—a burglar!

NATALIE }
OSCAR } : A burglar!

KATIE (*wringing her hands*): A burglar.....and the missus is alayin' there like dead—.

NATALIE (*startled*): Like dead—.

THE SOCK.

OSCAR: Are you sure?

KATIE: There aint no life to her at all. There's a black and blue mark across her forehead like she was hit with somethin' heavy—mebbe a bludgeon.....

NATALIE: Oh——brutally murdered—.

OSCAR (*quite self-possessed*): We must notify the police.

NATALIE (*frightened*): The police—.

OSCAR: Of course. The sooner, the better.

KATIE: They might catch the thief——.

NATALIE: The thief—oh—.

KATIE: Yes, m'am, the sock is gone!

OSCAR (*quietly*): So, the sock is gone. (*Walks to the wall telephone and takes up the receiver.*) Police Headquarters, please.

NATALIE: Oscar—.

OSCAR (*placing his hand over the transmitter*): Don't be upset, my dear. It's a well known fact that when a police officer is face to face with the obvious he sees nothing. He seeks rather the mysterious. It's our duty to aid the police and we mustn't let mysterious clues get cold.....Hello,—Headquarters? This is the apartment of Oscar Greaves, 4119 West 17th Street. I have just been informed that murder and burglary were committed in the apartment below mine. Send officers at once and have them see me first.....Yes, 4119 West 17th Street.....Very Good.
(*Hangs up the receiver.*)

KATIE: Thank you, kindly, sir—(*starts for door*)—I must tidy up 'fore the police come.

OSCAR: The first instinct of a housekeeper.

KATE: I'll reflect on me, sir, if it is untidy. *She wouldn't like it, sir, if she was alive.*

OSCAR: By the way, Katie, there might be some blame put on you—.

KATIE: Oh, sir——on me—.

OSCAR: For leaving her alone. But we know you were gone barely a minute.

KATIE: Thank you, sir, it were only a minute.

OSCAR: We were here all the time, and saw you go and come. I'm quite sure it was only a minute.
(*Exit Katie aflutter.*)

NATALIE (*sits quietly with hands in lap. Oscar takes up the violin and again plays the fantastic tune.*) Oscar, how can you—after—

OSCAR (*stopping*): I'll not play if it annoys you. But I must give vent to the exultation—.

NATALIE (*repelled*): Exult—exultation—(*rises.*) Oh,—murder—murder—oh—(*aghast*).

THE SOCK.

OSCAR: Murder, pshaw! It takes but a puff—to put out a guttering candle.

NATALIE: Are you without feeling?

OSCAR: I feel joy in my whole being. I feel buoyant. The weight of pelf has been lifted from us all.

NATALIE: Oh, how could you? A defenseless, feeble old woman..... oh! Brutal.....brutal..... worse.....cowardly!

OSCAR (*thoughtfully and in measured tones*): No....it takes strength, fearlessness—to slay sentimental scruples.

OSCAR: Did I kill for gain, glory, power? No.....Did I strike down a creature in the full vigor of life, creative, joyous? No.....I destroyed an ugly, strangling weed to preserve a beautiful plant. I serve posterity. One artist means more to the march of ages than ten million money-grubbers!

NATALIE (*heart-broken*): Oh, Oscar,—how you love Clara! How you love Clara! You did it all for her—not for art,—not for posterity!

OSCAR (*coldly*): It is not the murder that outrages you.....you are a woman after all.....jealous!

NATALIE: I am always a woman where you are concerned.

OSCAR (*wanders about the room; his spirit droops; speaks in a tired, worn voice*): Well, there's nothing left.....(*As if to himself*): My task is done.....What is left for me? (*Stops. With decision*): Let the police come. I'll save them a lot of bother.

NATALIE: What can you mean—.

OSCAR: I mean to confess—.

NATALIE: Confess—oh—oh—.

OSCAR: Why not? There's nothing left to live for.....Clara belongs to Harry..... I promised.....

NATALIE: And I—.

OSCAR (*surprised*): Eh? I thought you would be glad to see retribution overtake the murderer of an old woman. (*Drops tiredly into the rocking-chair*).

NATALIE (*kneels beside him*): Oscar, Oscar.....live for me. I am only a woman. Nothing matters..... wrongs, crimes..... nothing matters to a woman. Live for me. Oscar, Oscar,—live for me— (*Oscar stares vacantly beyond her.*)

CURTAIN.

TRIUMPH

I saw Triumph
That harlot!
That cozening, bedizzened courtesan!
That succubus.
With fascinating witchery she entices!
She lavishes herself on all men,

But

Her real lover is
Pestilent, brutal, blasphemous Death
Disguised as Mars!

I saw a sea—so red—so awfully red—
And on it float a barkentine
Made of the bones of men
Dried in their passions,
Covered with the skin of men
Stretched in agony!

And there

Triumph and her lover, Death,
Whirl nightly in the danse macabre!

Frances Kohan

BROTHERLY GREETINGS and a HANDCLASP!

Have you ever heard the critics, non-critics and critical pretenders ask: What is the matter with American literature?

Of course.

Well, friend, the reason is obvious. We of these United States have been knowingly and unknowingly encouraging, patronizing and dieting on the trite, the banal, the ordinary.

Mountains of newspaper rubbish, sententious slush and journalistic flim-flam are daily ground out by the never-ceasing mills and snatched up by the unthinking, the gullible!

You, sir or madam, are the criminal.

Every time you purchase, you create a demand.

What more need be said?

As we go along, we intend to gather up the choicest products of the pen, grown on our own soil.

We hope thereby to create a demand for the better things in our literature.

Let then the obscure, the modest, the rejected, the defeated take heart. A hungry public soon awaits your sincere offerings.

The frail flowers that a commercial market spurns must not be allowed to perish.

American letters must bloom as radiantly as contemporary European letters. Of that, we are determined.

Are you with us?

Then pass the word along.

* * *

And now—reader—having patiently travelled with us a short way, we would not willingly part unknown.

Will you send us a word of two expressing either an opinion, (favorable or unfavorable) a criticism, a suggestion, or merely a friendly word of encouragement. At any rate, your name and address should embellish our mailing list.

Let it not be said that we live in a world that is still covertly hostile or stolidly indifferent to its artists.

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The Three Hamphleteers

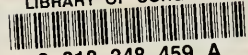
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